

To consider governance arrangements until 14th March 2022

Since the Council Meeting held on 1st November 2021 Covid rates have continued to climb and the Omicron variant has been identified. On 8th December the government announced the tightening of regulations, including compulsory mask wearing in all indoor venues <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-confirms-move-to-plan-b-in-england>. Guidance has also been issued to work from home where possible. In light of this Members are asked to review governance arrangements between now and the Council meeting in March, and to consider what emergency arrangements could be put in place for the setting of a precept should the Council be unable to meet.

Public Health Advice and introduction of ‘Plan B’

At the time of preparing this briefing note this is the latest public health advice, issued by Public Health Dorset on 10th December 2021.

- Take a rapid lateral flow test regularly, especially if you're meeting others.
- Get plenty of fresh air by meeting outdoors or keeping doors and windows open.
- Wear a face covering in indoor spaces, making sure it covers your mouth and your nose.

Case rates have risen since the last Council meeting from 515 per 100,000 to 600 per 100,000 in the Dorset Council area. The number of people in hospital in Dorset with COVID-19 has increased from 53 to 79.

The National Association of Local Councils has provided the following advice.

- From 10 December, face coverings are required by law in most indoor public places and the government has issued further [guidance](#). NALC's view of the guidance is that face coverings are required to be worn at council meetings held in indoor public places, subject to exemptions or reasonable excuses as set out in the guidance. Councils are also advised to consider not meeting in December.
- From 13 December 2021, those who can are advised to work from home. We are recommending that clerks and council staff attend council meetings remotely. Unfortunately, the Plan B guidance does not bring back the ability to hold remote meetings and we have lobbied ministers directly on this issue on several occasions this week. We are also suggesting that councils consider not meeting in December.

Furthermore, in order to prevent the spread of the Omicron variant the government website also advises the following:

Those who have come into contact with an individual who may have been infected with the Omicron variant will need to self-isolate. This will apply even if you are fully-vaccinated or aged 18 or under. NHS Test and Trace will contact you if this is the case.

It is understood that there will be a move to daily testing instead of self-isolation for Omicron contacts, but that this is dependent on a new form of test becoming available.

Arrangements for Council and Committee Meetings

At its meeting held on 1st November Council agreed arrangements for its meetings until 31st December 2021, as set out in the table at Appendix A. In summary, this provided for Council meetings and smaller committee meetings to continue to meet in person in appropriate venues, but that larger committees should meet online. Working parties, being informal meetings, could be held either in person or remotely.

Given the rise in Covid-19 case numbers, the introduction of Plan B (including the need to wear masks at all times in indoor settings) and the risk of self-isolation for anyone coming into contact with a potential case of the Omicron variant, Members are asked to increase the number of meetings that will be held online and re-introduce delegated decision-making arrangements in support of that. Under s. 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 all decisions can be delegated, except for the following:

- Levying the precept;
- Borrowing money;
- Approving the annual accounts and AGAR;
- Considering a public interest audit report;
- Adopting or revising the Code of Conduct.

The only decision that has to be taken in person by the full Council by law during this period, is the setting of a budget and precept for 2022/23. Dorset Council have requested to be notified of this prior to 31st January 2022. In order to limit the amount of physical contact, this could be discussed online and the decision then ratified at a physical meeting of a quorum of Members on 17th January, as planned.

If a meeting were to be prohibited due to additional regulations, and government doesn't legislate for online Council meetings, then a decision will have to be taken online and ratified as soon as possible by a physical meeting. If the Council were to receive sufficient notice of a tightening of regulations then the date could be brought forward to enable it to take place.

All other Council and committee meetings can be held informally online in an advisory capacity. In order to facilitate this, it is recommended that decision making be delegated to the Town Clerk between 14th December and the Council meeting scheduled on 14th March 2022. Such arrangements were in place during the first lockdown in the spring of 2020, and again during the easing of lockdown between May and July this year. As on those earlier occasions, this delegation would be exercised in consultation with councillors wherever possible, as follows:

Subject	Consultation prior to Decision
Matter arising from an existing Council minute	Mayor/Deputy Mayor
Minor matter within remit of established working party	Working Party either by e-mail or Zoom
Matter within remit of Committee or Sub-Committee	Members of committee by e-mail
Grant application under £10,000	Grants Panel via e-mail or Zoom

Recommendation from a committee/sub-committee/advisory committee not yet approved by Council	Full Council by e-mail
Significant decisions, such as a change in policy or commitment to spend requiring urgent decision prior to March Council Meeting	Full Council by Zoom

Examples of 'significant decisions' requiring consultation with full Council include:

- Commitment of unbudgeted expenditure in excess of £10,000.
- Significant changes in council policy.
- Awards of contracts or grants in excess of £10,000.
- Entering into leases or tenancy agreements with new third parties.

Should these arrangements be agreed, the Town Clerk will keep a log of all decisions made under these delegated powers, which will be reported to the Estimates Meeting held on 17th January and the Council Meeting to be held on 14th March.

As per previous arrangements, in a situation where the Town Clerk is incapacitated it is proposed that the Finance Manager would take the place of the Town Clerk.

The impact of these potential additional measures on Council meetings scheduled prior to 14th March 2022 are set out in the table below. If during this period the Government passes legislation to enable decisions to be taken by remote meetings then the scheme of delegation would cease and Council could operate as it did between June 2020 and early May 2021.

Meeting	Potential additional measures
Estimates Meeting 17 th January	Online meeting of Full Council to consider the budgets and agree a precept, the decision to be ratified at a meeting of a quorum of Members, open to the public. Delegated authority to be given to change the date of the meeting if required to meet Council obligations.
Full Council 31 st January	Delegate decisions to the Town Clerk, in consultation with relevant councillors, as per the arrangements that were in place between 5 th May and 26 th July 2021. Hold online in an advisory capacity, if required.
Committee Meetings with outside representatives 2 nd February - Roads & Transport 23 rd February - Beach Management	Continue to hold informally online.

<p>Committee and Sub-Committee Meetings without outside representatives</p> <p>16th February - Policy, Finance & Performance Management</p> <p>10th January, 7th February & 7th March - Planning & Consultation</p> <p>tbc</p> <p>Capital Projects and Personnel</p>	<p>Move to hold online, thereby enabling staff to work remotely in accordance with government guidance and provide access for anyone who is unable to attend.</p> <p>Planning & Consultation Committee comments on planning applications to be sent to Dorset Council as usual, under Town Clerk's delegated authority.</p>
<p>Working Parties</p>	<p>Hold online or outdoors to reduce amount of physical contact and risk of virus transmission.</p> <p>Online meetings will enable staff to work remotely in accordance with government guidance and provide access for anyone who is unable to attend in person.</p>

Action required:

To consider delegating all decision making to the Town Clerk until 14th March 2022 (or the introduction of legislation authorising remote decision making if earlier), except where matters are expressly reserved to full Council by statute, with appropriate steps being taken for consultation with elected members in accordance with the table above.

To delegate authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, to change the arrangements for the Estimates Meeting if necessary and to make appropriate risk-assessed arrangements for the Council Meeting on 14th March 2022.

To note that the Town Mayor retains the right to call an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council at any time, provided it can be held in accordance with Covid-19 regulations and an appropriate risk assessment.

Martin Ayres
Town Clerk

December 2021

Appendix A – Meeting arrangements agreed 1st November 2021

Meeting	Arrangements	Reason
Full Council	Continue in person at Swanage School Hall or other venue with adequate capacity and ventilation.	Larger venue provides capacity for potential increased number of attendees and reduces close-proximity interaction before and after the meeting.
Committee Meetings with outside representatives (Roads & Transport/Tourism/General Operations/Beach Management)	Hold on Zoom in an advisory capacity.	Uncertainty over numbers attending, lack of alternative venues during the day and cost of room hire. Reduce the risk of transmitting disease by limiting number of contacts and reducing total number of in-person meetings.
Committee and Sub-Committee Meetings without outside representatives (Policy, Finance & Performance Management/Personnel/Planning & Consultation/Capital Projects)	Hold in person in the Council Chamber at Swanage Town Hall	Adequate space in well-ventilated Council Chamber for 16 attendees.
Working Parties	To meet either in person or via Zoom, as agreed by lead councillor and officer	As small informal meetings there is complete flexibility as to how these meetings are held.

Communications Strategy Working Party - notes from meeting held on 1st December 2021

Present:

Councillor Foster (Lead Councillor)

Councillor Moreton

Councillor Tomes

Miss N Clark (Administration and Communications Manager)

Mrs E Evans (Management Support Officer)

Also in attendance:

Councillor Harris

Councillor Whitwam (until 4.25 p.m.)

A meeting of the Communications Strategy Working Party had been arranged to discuss the Town Council's vision and aspirations for its future Communications Strategy, and any 'quick wins'.

The following matters were discussed:-

1) Additional working party members

It was noted that the working party currently consisted of four members, a third of total council members, and was deemed sufficient at this time by working party members present at the meeting. However, a reminder was given that any councillor could attend any working party meeting if they wished to do so. It was also confirmed that any recommendations made by the working party would be reported to full council for further consideration.

2) Terms of Reference

Members felt that Terms of Reference were not required at this time, but would be considered/established for a specific task or project in the future.

3) Town Hall Noticeboard

A discussion was held regarding the current poor condition of the noticeboard, which included:-

- The doors had become warped, the lettering had become faded, and the backing had deteriorated and needed replacing.
- The board had many rusty drawing pins which needed to be removed.
- Updated councillor information was required, including photographs of members.
- Ideas for content for the noticeboard were discussed, and a suggestion made that it could be split into information 'zones', e.g. council business, community, weddings, events.
- The advantages/disadvantages of either replacement or refurbishment of the existing board were discussed.

- A suggestion was made that refurbishment works may be able to be undertaken 'in-house' by the Operations Team, and any costs potentially covered by existing maintenance budgets.
- Listed building restrictions may affect installation of a new noticeboard and contact would need to be made with the local planning authority accordingly.
- Costings/quotes would need to be sought for either refurbishment or renewal.

Officers would look into the above matters accordingly and report back to a future meeting.

It was AGREED:-

TO RECOMMEND: That the Town Council considers allocating a budget to either refurbish or replace the existing noticeboard, subject to costings being obtained, and further information being sought from the local planning authority.

4) Swanage Matters Newsletter

Previous editions of the newsletter were circulated to members for information purposes, and during the ensuing discussion the following suggestions were made:-

- Members felt that the newsletter should be resurrected and issued quarterly.
- Sustainability considerations – use of recycled paper, distribution method i.e. to all households or via online distribution (email/website/Facebook). The possibility of a flyer/survey to local residents first to gauge interest and obtain feedback on what they would like to see, and by which 'channel' they would prefer to receive the newsletter.
- Due to existing staffing constraints, the council should aim to produce a newsletter in spring 2022, two to four pages in length, covering council activities and future plans. Comments were made that the newsletter should include a feedback form to enable residents to have their say regarding published articles, and/or what items they would wish to see in future editions.
- Copies of the newsletter could also be widely distributed to businesses in the town, e.g. Swanage Library, the Information Centre and hotels/guesthouses.

5) Town Council's Website

It was anticipated that a tender process would be undertaken in spring 2022 for a new fully accessible website. It was noted that:-

- Three website providers had been identified, all of which currently worked with other Town Councils (the websites had been reviewed), and each provider would be undertaking a presentation to the working party and officers as part of the tender process. Details of the Council's requirements would be provided to the companies ahead of the presentations.
- Officers continued to update the existing website regularly and it had been made as accessible as possible. It would be a requirement for the new website to be fully compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1.
- Members would be reviewing the existing website pages and would make officers aware of any additions/amendments/information they would wish to make/see in due course.

6) Social Media

The Council's Social Media Policy had been reviewed by members.

It was reported that training workshops had recently been undertaken by officers in relation to social media, effective communication and engagement for town and parish councils in a post-COVID world, and developing an effective communications strategy (through DAPTC with Breakthrough Communications), and the presentations from this training were provided to members for information purposes.

It was noted that:-

- Officers currently posted/reposted official and relevant information on the Council's Facebook page, which included information received from partner organisations (e.g. Dorset Council, Public Health Dorset and local community groups/projects), which was well-received by the local community, and the page currently had over 1,000 'likes' and over 1,400 'followers'.
- Members were keen for:-
- More 'sharing' opportunities between the Council's, Mayor's and Swanage Information Centre's FB pages.
- Greater use of photographs of the town/surrounding area/council's works and projects.
- More opportunities for the regular 'scheduling' of posts for future dates.

Details were provided regarding a Facebook group which had been created for officers of Town Councils to provide 'networking' opportunities and the sharing of 'best practices' between councils.

7) I.T. for Council Meetings

Members had again reviewed the briefing note dated November 2021 (To consider governance arrangements autumn/winter 2021 and use of technology to enhance remote/hybrid meetings) which had been debated and agreed at the Full Council Meeting held on 1st November 2021. At the meeting a budget had been set aside for the possible purchase of equipment to improve the quality of broadcast and potentially facilitate 'hybrid' meetings/improve the experience of those accessing Council meetings remotely. However, Councillors had felt that a trial needed to be undertaken before a commitment to procure new equipment was made.

A discussion ensued and the following points were noted:-

- Current legislation stated that members must be physically present to vote in a meeting and that the meeting needed to be quorate.
- However, as set out in the above briefing note, some committee/working party meetings were currently being held online.
- Members agreed that it would be important for the Council to be able to hold 'hybrid' meetings in the future, to provide access to meetings to those unable to attend in person.
- Solutions to enable the hosting of hybrid meetings were being sought and an update would be provided at a future meeting. A suggestion was made that the Council could explore the possibility of a free trial of the Owl Pro device.
- It was reported that officers would be speaking to officers at Chippenham Town Council regarding that Council's existing arrangements for meetings, and the livestreaming of meetings on YouTube (which had been viewed).

8) Laptops for Councillors

Members were keen to progress the procurement of new laptops for Councillors. As noted in the above briefing note, officers had recently met with the Council's I.T. provider and a trial had been undertaken in the Town Hall Chambers with an ASUS BR1100 laptop, which had been identified as a suitable model for the Council's requirements. The total cost of these would be in the region of £4,000 (£275 + VAT each).

- The ASUS device information sheet had recently been shared with all Town Councillors, and was again reviewed by working party members.
- The benefits of the laptop were discussed, which included access to Outlook email and calendar functions, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher, OneDrive and SharePoint. This would increase the ease of being able to share documents with all members using the same system instead of councillors using their own computers (problems were experienced at times by Councillors with some documents).
- The trial at the Town Hall had also included a Teams online meeting which proved very successful with clear visuals and audio.

It was AGREED:-

TO RECOMMEND: That the Town Council proceeds with the procurement of the twelve ASUS BR110 laptops, along with related set-up costs.

9) Any other matters

There were no other matters raised.

10) Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting would be arranged in due course.



Dorset Coast Forum Project Proposal



Sustainable Swanage Officer Proposal 2022 - 2025

Sustainable Swanage is a group established in Swanage as part of the town's ongoing efforts to become a more sustainable community and protect the environment. For the past year, the Dorset Coast Forum have hosted the project directly and before that it was hosted as part of Litter Free Coast and Sea for a year as a trial. The group was born out of a Litter Free Coast and Sea project that focussed on Swanage for three years and so it was decided to grow the group and have a project officer in place to drive it's work and administer the group.

This proposal outlines the work done so far, what projects we propose to do and what the ambition is to embed the legacy of the project into the community and transition it to a community led group with support from other organisations.

Sustainable Swanage work April 2021 – September 2021

In the first six months of year 2 being funded by STC, Covid-19 has continued to affect what we have been able to achieve and several of the project ideas mentioned in the previous proposal have still been on hold. Of the list of outputs highlighted below we have again achieved all but 2 of them. We have been unable to organise or attend events and been unable to hold open meetings as we did before however have held several successful online meeting events. Engagement with the youth group, schools and businesses has also continued to be restricted. As restrictions have eased and more opportunities have arisen to continue as we had before, several of the new project ideas are well progressed. We have begun to have meetings in person and hold and attend small events. Key outcomes include:

- Developed social media content on both Facebook and Instagram, we now have 663 followers on Facebook and 614 on Instagram.
- Organised 4 themed open meetings.
- Launch and progression of the Solar Streets scheme that at the end of June 34 surveys had been completed, 11 installations booked or installed and £400 was allocated to the IDDEA's Solar Streets Swanage Community Fund.
- Creation of the Prospect Green plan with tree planting, meadow creation and surveying.
- Worked with three schools and two churches on their plans and maintenance of green spaces.
- Completed public survey for the Peveril Downs and hosting an open information meeting. Setting up of a Friends group has begun with 175 people on the mailing list, 15 volunteers involved in wildlife surveying and 3 public guided walks undertaken with more planned.
- Set up a group to monitor Swifts in Swanage and ran a 12 weeks survey programme with 7 volunteers, plans to install nest boxes this winter.
- Active Travel group has been set up with regular meetings and campaigns and projects being progressed.
- Background work and links have been set up to establish a community fridge, a new waste action group and a business award scheme and business forum to be developed over autumn/winter 2021/2022.
- Established volunteer role profiles with an aim to recruit more regular volunteers in the autumn.

The proposal

The proposal is for Swanage Town Council to continue to support this work through a dedicated Sustainable Swanage Officer for a further three years to ensure the work is embedded within the community. During that time period, the project would look at mechanisms for continuing to support it within the community. We propose that this goes alongside projects in the DCF team. Being part of a hosted partnership provides outside input from the team, support and ideas and also connections with other organisations and the host Dorset Council.

Many outputs will remain as before with some ideas for specific projects to develop.



Dorset Coast Forum Project Proposal



Outputs

Core work

- Embedding the group and sub-groups into the community ensuring it is community led and has a legacy.
- Developing a mechanism for the community group to be supported either through administration or other forms of support from relevant organisations.
- General Administration of the group and projects.
- Management of the finances, membership and communications of Sustainable Swanage.
- Continue to coordinate and chair the regular steering group meetings.
- Co-ordinate the sub-group projects and volunteers involved.
- Organise wider community meetings addressing different topics and issues.
- Promote the work of the group more widely and engage with partners and groups across Purbeck and Dorset to collaborate where possible.
- Helping to develop and write funding bids for specific work.
- Carry out relevant surveys with the community for new ideas on a range of topics.
- Continue to reach more members of the community to encourage, educate and embed environmental best practice as stated in the Council Environment Action Plan. We will do this through social media content, website content, open meetings, involving other groups in the projects we are running.
- Continue to provide support the community with their ideas and projects where appropriate.

Potential project-based work

- Developing a three-year work programme for projects and initiatives and delivering that programme including events such as Swanage Spring Clean, Swanage Environment Day and Planet Purbeck.
- Develop a business forum with a sustainable Swanage business award scheme to increase business engagement.
- Develop several relevant campaigns for Sustainable Swanage using the latest behaviour change research to develop them.
- LNR designation continue with this to completion of designation.
- Continuation of the greening projects and identify 2 further sites to develop using the Green Infrastructure Strategy as guidance.
- Work with other organisations to contribute to setting up repair shop/café in Swanage.
- Work with local partners to set up an efficient mobile practical work group to assist projects on public land, schools and churches.

Why Dorset Coast Forum?

Under the Dorset Coast Forum, Sustainable Swanage can act as a neutral partnership to facilitate discussions and ensure that there is a coordinated approach and accountability to the group. The team has extensive experience in delivery of community campaigns, project management, community engagement and consultation and forming and administering community groups and partnerships. The expertise of the wider team with project management, community campaigns and engagement will add value. DCF can also provide accountability for finances, responsibility for delivery of the work programme, team input into projects and management, HR and ICT equipment, communication platforms to disseminate key messages and events including a dedicated webpage on a professional website and a wide Dorset and regional reach. They can also provide connections to other partnerships and groups through the wider work of the Dorset Coast Forum.



Dorset Coast Forum Project Proposal



Proposal costs:

Expenditure	Yr1 Cost (£)	Yr2 Cost (£)	Yr3 Cost (£)
Travel and subsistence	200	200	200
Staff time	13,958	14,237	14,522
Management and hosting costs	3000	3000	3000
Sub-total	17,158	17,437	17,722
Optional Costs			
Project Resources (eg. Signage, website, meetings/events developing business award scheme or displays)	2700	1700	1700
Total	19,858	19,137	19,564

Staff time based on salary costs for a 0.4FTE project officer plus on-costs.

The total cost for 3 years is **£58,559**.

Contact details

Name: Toni Powell
Position: DCF Coordinator
Tel: 01305 224731
Email: dorset.coast@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
Website: www.dorsetcoast.com